



HISTORY OF POLICE IN MEDIEVAL GUJARAT

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ABSTRACT

The field of enquiry of this paper is the growth and evolution of police administration in the Indian polity of the medieval times. With the emergence of principalities and kingdoms in the ancient times it became imperative for the political structure to have an organization that can help in the maintenance of law and order. This organization that was created to fulfil the functional prerequisites of the system was the police force. In spite of its political origins, the organization has also taken over a social role in its evolutionary growth. The paper also looks into the administrative structures and organization of police, and elements of change and continuity within the said structure.

KEYWORDS: Police, Medieval India, Mughals, Marathas

INTRODUCTION

The study of Ancient and Medieval India is a fascinating field of study and enquiry for the commoners as well as for the historians. This period has given rise to numerous debates, both at an intellectual and popular level. The field of enquiry of this paper is the growth and evolution of police administration in the Indian polity. With the emergence of principalities and kingdoms, it became imperative for the political establishment to create a force that would aid and assist the political structures in maintaining control over the territories it possessed and the populace as per the rules or laws of the land. The rulers required a special branch of officers and government servants who would play a vital role in the maintenance of law and order in the realm. This gave rise to a class of officers and government servants who are today termed as 'police'. The functional pre-requisite of the system to sustain itself, and avoid crimes and internal conflicts was hence to be fulfilled by such a force.

Mughal conquest of Gujarat:

Akbar, one of the greatest rulers of the Mughal Dynasty in India, succeeded his father, Humayun, to the throne in 1555. First under the regency of Bairam Khan and later independently, Akbar was able to set up the Mughal State spreading from the Kabul in the North-West to Bengal in the East, and from Kashmir in the North to Deccan in the south. It is in his imperial campaigns that the Gujarat campaign remains one of the most researched. His speedy expedition to Gujarat in 1573 to quash a rebellion immediately after his return to Agra, and the construction of 'Bulanda Darwaza' to commemorate the Gujarat victory testify the importance of this conquest. Gujarat, after 1573, was incorporated into the Mughal Empire as a 'Subah' (Province) and consisted of no less than 16 sarkars or districts. Patan, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Godhra, Champaner, Nandod, Broach, Sorath and Surat were under direct control of the Central administration.¹ These were further divided into 198 Parganas and were treated as crown land or Jagirs. These Jagirs were assigned to various nobles and fiefs who were in charge of both revenue and maintenance of security in the region.

The Subah as a whole was placed under an Imperial officer initially called Sipah Salar and who later came to be known as Nazim or Subhedar which can be equated with the modern day

post of Viceroy. He was the Emperor's representative in the Subah and had joint military and civil duties. Mirza Aziz Koka was the first Nazim appointed in Gujarat by Akbar in the year 1573.²

Akbar's Administrative Arrangements, and Mansabdari System: Akbar combined the rich Persian derived administrative tradition of the Indo-Muslim states and the sharp, extraction-oriented organizational tradition of the Turkic-Mongol conquest empires from the steppe.³ He thus formed the backbone of the Mughal Empire through centralized, hierarchical and bureaucratic offices. The Emperor was the chief executive of this elaborate system that was standardized with fixed rules and regulations and ministers who were well qualified. All these ministers and their huge cadre of assistants was drawn from imperial servants or Mansabdars.⁴

There was no distinction between civil and military function in the Mughal state. The soldiers performed both military and civil duties. During peace times, they performed duties of policing, apprehending robbers and maintaining law and order. Mir Bakshi or Paymaster General was the head of the Mughal military. Since Mughal state has been termed by many as a police state, no distinction was made between civil and military officers. Every official was first a soldier and then anything else. Except some officials of the revenue and judicial department, all other officials could be called for military duty anytime by the Emperor. Mir Bakshi kept contact with all Mansabdars, looked to their transfers and briefing them about their calls for active war duty. He also appointed Amirs⁵ in different regions of the Empire. He arranged military campaigns but was not the Commander in chief of the army. He took over actual command only when the Emperor asked him to do so. He was also in charge of the stable, means of communication and transport for armies on the move and held charge of the Commissariat as well. He appointed military scouts, news agents, spies, etc. in the different regions of the Empire and in frontier lands, keeping the Emperor updated regarding all important events. He posted royal guards and changed them frequently. He also took charge of royal tours and hunts and was responsible for the Emperor's entourage. He was to always be present with the Emperor. He acted as a confidant and military advisor of the Emperor. He had a number

of Bakshi's working under his authority in the military department.

Another important imperial officer was the Darogha-i-Dak Chowki, who headed the intelligence and postal department. He supervised all news writers and spies and he along with his team worked independently of the Mir Bakshi and his spies. Hence, we see that there was a remarkable communication and coordination between two separate wings of law and order maintenance, i.e. the police and the intelligence network. These formed, and do continue to form, two facets of police administration in the contemporary times.

The Subah of Gujarat:

The provincial administration in Gujarat was similar to the central administration. The Mughal Subah of Gujarat was divided into Sarkars which were further divided into Parganas or Tehsils. Each district had a Shiqdar or a Faujadar, an Amalguzar, Bititkchi, Khazandar and many other minor officials. The Shiqdar or Faujdar was a military officer and had a small force under him. He worked under the Subedar of the district. He was appointed by the governor of the province. They were to be physically fit and adept at all weapons. They also were responsible for guarding roads.

The Office of Kotwal:

Besides these, there was another officer called the Kotwal who combined the offices of the Police Commissioner and Municipal Commissioner. He had under him 200-300 policemen. He apprehended thieves and kept a strict watch on all anti-social elements in the province. He also had magisterial powers in criminal cases and could confine suspicious characters for as long as he wanted. He also appointed night watchmen and posted plain clothes police in the cities. The post of Kotwal can be thus be equated with the modern day police. He was to patrol the roads during nights and maintain registers of the houses in his locality and population of the town, the people who came in and left town, commonly used roads. He was also to appoint spies from among the citizens of the town and receive daily reports from them. He established serais⁶ at the entrance to the town and any unknown guests were to be held there till confirmation could be received from the citizens of the town to whom they were visitors. Kotwal also was to keep a check on the various merchant guilds and appoint one among them as the broker and another as the head of the guild. He was in charge of building gates and road blocks at various places in the town. He was to disallow people to enter or leave the town after midnight. He also took charge of town planning and allotting separate quarters for the butchers, hunters, washers of the dead, sweepers, etc. However, the main difference between the modern police officer and the office of the Kotwal was that the latter had judicial powers also combined in his office while the former do not.

In order to ensure high standards of police administration and general efficiency, the Mughals made the Kotwal personally responsible for the property and the security of the people. Akbar, like Sher Shah, had decreed the fixing of responsibility of village chiefs for highway robberies in their territories that the Kotwal was to either recover the stolen goods or be held responsible for their loss. In the absence of an elaborate system of checks and counter checks at the lower divisions of administration, this was the most viable alternative in front of the rulers to ensure a just and efficient administration of law and order.

The office of the Kotwal in particular, and the Mughal system of police administration in general, did influence the British when

they started drawing up the administrative framework of their empire of India.

Maratha Interlude:

Aurangzeb's fanatic rule was a beacon for all restless chieftains to stir trouble in the Mughal Empire, and call for their independence from the imperial rule. One such ruler that emerged in western India was Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. In order to spell trouble for Aurangzeb's Empire and also to finance the Maratha's struggle for independence, Gujarat was raided numerous times from the start of the 17th century by Maratha forces.

The Maratha connection with Gujarat can be divided into 3 stages, first the forages and inroads into Gujarat by the Marathas between 1664-1743, then the mercenary period where Maratha officials interfered into Mughal politics taking advantage of the dissensions among the Viceroy's of the Mughals and the various Chieftains in Gujarat and lastly the period of Gaikwad domination from 1760- 1801. Following this year however, the disputes and differences between the Peshwa and the Gaikwads led to weakening of power on both ends. Power and influence had already passed into hands of the British East India Company long before 1819 when Peshwa Bajirao was defeated.

The small chieftains of the various provinces in Gujarat had no semblance of organised administration but following law of the strongest. They constantly competed with one another for more power. Administration meant collecting more than enough revenue to maintain themselves and their forces. There was no co-operation or combined movement against a foreign enemy. Pride and honour were the epitome of their existence. They never yielded, except to an exponentially superior force. Till then, they kept resisting the demands made by the enemies until finally agreeing to a settlement. This was done mostly out of fear of the weakening his state resisting the foreigners and risking an annexation by the neighbouring states instead. Interestingly, Gujarat had never really been conquered and subjugated, although it was raided and run over numerous times. The Chieftains agreed to a settlement with foreigners as that usually meant payment of a tribute; but, when it came to administering the province that was left to the local chieftains even after raids. Thus, accepting payment of tribute to superior enemies was not really considered degrading.⁷

Thanks to this attitude both Mughals and Marathas found it useful and to their advantage to merely follow a pattern of successive expeditions in Gujarat rather than establishing a permanent seat of authority there.

Gaekwads of Baroda:

In 1721, a Maratha General by name Pilaji Gaekwad successfully captured the city of Baroda from its Mughal chieftains, and received it as a fief from the Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath. His nephew Damaji succeeded him and started an organised subjugation of the various provinces in Gujarat under the leadership of the Peshwa. His raids and expeditions were conducted annually. The state was divided into three 'Prants': Kadi in the north, Baroda in the central region and Navsari in the south. Kathiwar was then known as the Amreli Prant.⁸

There is no certain evidence as to the Marathas wanting to establish a strong, permanent rule in Gujarat, at least not until the British East India Company defeated the Peshwa and empowered a separate and independent court at Baroda under the Gaekwads who became their powerful allies and even accepted a British Resident at their court. The Gaekwads

continued to rule in the Baroda state till its accession to India in 1949.

CONCLUSION:

The system of policing underwent many changes with every conquest of India by foreign invaders. The existing legal system of the Mauryan and Hindu traditions was changed to the Muslim legal system. However, this system could not be applied in exactly the same fashion as it was in their home territories. Thus it was amended to make a unique blend of the Persian–Arab system with that of the Indian system incorporating the multiracial, multicultural and multi-religious Indian environment. The creation of a police force emanated from the needs of the political and economic system of a territorial empire based on the preservation of hierarchical society, and was therefore made subservient to the system as a whole. Role of the police therefore was to enforce the dominance of the ruling elite as it was a tool in the hand of the rulers.

REFERENCES

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2. Ibid., p. 3.
3. Quoted in Richards J. F. The Mughal Empire, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 58.
4. Ibid., Akbar instituted a novel system in 1570 to regulate and keep under check the imperial officers called the Mansabdari system. Mansabdar meant rank holder or office holder. For more information on the Mansabdari system initiated by Akbar, refer to J. L. Mehta's Advanced study in history of medieval India Vol II or J. F. Richard's The Mughal Empire.
5. Amirs were Mansabdars of a rank above 5000.
6. Serais were a combination of check posts and rest houses built on highways and were usually found at the town or city entry points.
7. Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Volume I, op. cit., p. 417.
8. Imperial Gazetteer of India, Volume 7, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908, p. 25.